

## **“Ktuhkelokepon” Awakening our Indigeneity: A Wabanaki Story of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation**

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### **Introduction**

“If this is your land,’ [the elder] asked, ‘where are your stories?’ He spoke in English, but then he moved into Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people - and told a story” (Chamberlin, 2004).

*Stories make up the histories of our nations, and along with the Gitksan, coastal peoples on the other side of these vast lands, those residing in Wabanaki territory have tides of ancestral knowledge they are waiting to share. For the Wolastoqiyik, time is of the essence as our lands and waters, language and culture, are collectively being diluted through the processes of colonial policy and practice, and ultimately through lost stories and the loss of Wolastoqi speakers. In this offering, we share five principles of natural law as we draw from the ceremonial strength and language knowledge of Wolastoqi Elder Imelda Perley in our story-making. Here, we present to you a notion of deep knowing, being and doing through the vigor of the language itself and the energy force of our ancestors.*

“*Ktuhkelokepon* is an awakening of our ancestral spirits,” (Perley, I., 2015, pc). Situated here on the lands now known as New Brunswick, Wolastoqiyik, or the peoples of the river, call upon their grandmother, Wolastoq (Grandmother River, also

known as the St. John River) and the Stone Medicine People of the Wabanaki nation to buoy our clan in this awakening, and through the reclaiming of Indigeneity. For Wolastoqiyik, our worldview, oral histories, territories and waters, air, ceremonies, traditions and language form a woven braid of sweet grass; as a collective, *Wetapeksi* cannot be separated in the pursuit of a resurgent Indigeneity. Here on the campus at the University of New Brunswick, Wolastoqi elders, knowledge keepers, scholars and allies work together as we advance a storywork of reconciliation, awakening and transformation (Archibald, 2008a, 2008b; Perley, I., 2015).

*Wetapeksi*—the foundation of relationality, holism and synergy within Wolastoqi kinship implies history, ceremony, land, language, and all that lives. As knowledge keepers, linguists, scholars and allies, we heed the words of this Gitksan elder as we choose to tell our stories, as we choose *Ktuhkelokepon*. And so it is that we, too, use the language of the Wolastoqey nation in this storywork of awakening, and in our indigenization of neo-colonial New Brunswick. As we seek to present this story of Wolastoqey knowledges, we honour the wisdoms found within *Skicinuwitahasuwakon*. It is this thinking from our culture, our language and our worldview that abets in the reclaiming and restoration of our Indigeneity.

The decolonizing research of the Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre values storywork (Archibald, 2008a) as the key to *Namkomihptune* of Wolastoqiyik. In this worldview, we move beyond reconciliation, as our collective voices seek a new and fluid way of being, this found "through seven-generation thinking" (Perley, I., 2015, pc). With the infusion of Wolastoqey, the language of the peoples, we are not burdened by the pursuit of

peace and redemption. Rather, we are empowered by ancestral spirits who tell us to “carry it forward to the generations yet to come” (Perley, I., 2015, pc) to a place of transformation, revitalized and fresh. In a sense, Indigeneity is self-governance; it is knowledge and identity, all of which are intellectual, political, energy focused and even radical (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2014; Kress, 2014). We understand Indigeneity to encompass all of these attributes and more: these are inseparable.

Through the Indigenous research of Archibald’s Storywork (2008a, 2008b) we advance a reclaiming of Indigeneity in the revitalization of *Sankewitahasuwawsuwakon*. The resurfacing of Wolastoqi blood memory helps our ontologies generate a Wabanaki thinking and walking, that which is done in a good way. *Sankewitahasuwawsuwakon* situates itself as a pedagogy of peace and produces a landscape necessary for the preservation and transformation of Wolastoqey. For us, this pursuit of Indigeneity insists that the meaning of Wolastoqey permeates the fabric of New Brunswick society, most critically within the culture of modern-day education policy and practice. Through the indigenization initiatives of the Mi’kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, we have come to understand *Piliwitahasuwawsuwakon* as a process and place of conscientization, both reflective and active (Freire, 1970). The meaning of this Wolastoq word implies “your mind is changing; it is transforming, and you are going to walk in that way,” (Perley, I., 2015, pc). The power of *Piliwitahasuwawsuwakon* is found in reformed signage around UNB and within the actions of faculty, staff and students within the Faculty of Education. It is found in the Medicine Wheel Garden and in the smiles of students as they meet with their Wolastoq advisors and receive support from their Wolastoqi Elder-in-Residence. These smiles understand *Ntokehkikem*, *Ntokehkims* (I teach, I learn) to be one

and the same (Perley, I., 2015, pc).

*Piliwitasuwasuwakon* is found in the cultural motifs of the Wabanaki nation, the oral histories relaying promise of treaties long forgotten by settler men and women. It is found in Wolastoq murals and art, in the Wampum belt ceremonies and knowledges, and in the digital water songs and stories; it is found in “Before the Dam” (Perley, Perley, Plaice & Valk, 2015) and “Koluskap and the Giant Beaver” (Bear, 2015), and in Wolastoqi elders' spoken words on age-old archived tapes. It is found in the first Red Shawl Campaign, exposition, vigil and healing walk to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women, and their families. It is found in the reclaiming of ceremony, the building of sweat lodges and drums, and in the retrieving and blessing of pipes in museums. It is revealed in a flash of regalia and colour, and through a Wolastoq heartbeat of music, singing, dance and drumming during the first UNB Powwow. It is found within the academic discourse of the Peace and Friendship Treaty Days Symposium held in the fall of the year. Moreover, it is within the hearts and minds of those who listen and learn from Wolastoqi elders and knowledge keepers in the Circle of Understanding.

Within the traditional territories of Wolastoqiyik, one could say the University of New Brunswick must stand as a Canadian ally for the Wolastoqi keepers of the Eastern door. Today, we know that more than two hundred years of colonial impacts and oppression, and a mix of French-Anglo church, government and military relations overshadow and dilute the worldview of Wolastoqiyik, and likewise, the Peace and Friendship Treaties of the Wabanaki nation. In this position, we hold the University of New Brunswick responsible and accountable to the recommendations found within the *Truth and Reconciliation*

*Commission's* framework, and in the *94 Calls to Action*. It is within this protocol we undertake to ensure *Ktuhkelokepon* is protected and advanced to help Wolastoqiyik peoples generate the stories, the smiles, the tears and the laughs of their Wolastoqi elders, children and chiefs as they share *Elawsultiyeqqon* (their histories and existence) with students in the faculties of law, education, arts, nursing, forestry, history and the environmental sciences, and more. We do this so they in turn, will be able to help all reach *Namkomihptune*.

## Chapter Overview:

Kress, M. (2015). *Sankewitahasuwawsuwakon*: Ways of peace.

*"Ktuhkelokepon"* is an awakening of our ancestral spirits (Perley, I., 2015, pc) and in this sense we begin to learn that the embodied nature of blood memory has an impact on all that we know, all that we are, and all that we do, and even in that of who we may become (Martin, 2003). Through Indigenous research methodologies (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009) and Storywork (Archibald, 2008a, 2008b), we advance a reclaiming of Indigeneity in the revitalization of *Sankewitahasuwawsuwakon*. The resurfacing of Wolastoqey blood memory prepares our thinking for an epistemology which honours our ancestors' words and wisdoms, and it empowers our ontologies to move us to a pathway of peace. This Wabanaki thinking and walking encompasses entities of respect, generosity, reciprocity and accountability (Kovach, 2009). The Wolastoqey word *Sankewitahasuwawsuwakon* embodies *Sanke* which is 'peace,' *tahas*, which is 'thinking' and *waws*, which is 'life.' Collectively this understanding is an embodiment of peace; a pedagogy of peace for all. As one on the journey, we are committed to producing a landscape of preservation and

transformation for Wolastoqey. *Sankewitahasuwawakon* breathes life into oral histories, ceremonies, traditions and language as it weaves through the sweet grass of the Wabanaki nation and into the life bloods of our youth.

Perley, D. (2015). *Elawsultiyeqpon*: History lives in Wolastoq.

The life histories of Wolastoqiyik are embodied within our territories, our language, our artifacts, our symbolisms, our ceremonies and our traditions. *Elawsultiyeqpon* refers to the ways in which we lived. The wisdom and the words of our ancestors are carried in the wampum belts and the blood memories of our peoples. This history lives through both oral and written knowledges and in the ways we come to know and be. Wampum belts symbolize the sacred covenants of our peoples, and the necessity to honour our treaties. In the knowledges of our ancestors, these sacred objects rest upon the recognition of a nation-to-nation relationship. In this way, Indigeneity presumes self-governance and the reclaiming of Wolastoq identity and worldview.

Perley, I. (2015). *Skicinuwitahasuwakon*: Wolastoq and Earthwalker.

*Skicinuwitahasuwakon* is the embodiment of our heritage. It is the rebirthing of our ancestral ways through the discovery of the gifts of our land and waters and in the messages of our peoples. *Skicinuwitahasuwakon* encompasses the earth walk we find ourselves in as our understanding grows. Every breath, every step, every heartbeat is sacred. Thus, we must honour our time on this land, and greet the stories of our ancestors' Stone Medicine People with ceremony. For me, as Elder-in-Residence, the recent

reemergence of a petroglyph along Grandmother Wolastoq has particular significance as a foreshadowing of the changes to come. The restoration of our ancestors' wisdoms in our daily lives becomes our earth walk.

Plaice, E. (2015). *Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon*: Transformation.

*Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon* is a process through which we become aware, enlightened and transformed. As with conscientization (Freire, 1970), *Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon* implies “your mind is changing” (Perley, I., 2015, pc.), transforming your journey through life, your relationships and responsibilities, your walk on this earth. *Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon* is a continuous and continuing evolution of thinking and being. The power of *Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon* is found in the resurfacing of Wolastoqey (language) in our educational institutions and faculties, our classes and on the lips of new generations of students who are beginning to breathe and learn in a respectful Wolastoqey environment.

*Piliwitalhasuwawsuwakon* is found in cultural motifs, oral histories, art and ceremonies of the Wabanaki nation. It is fostered in the voices of the elders, in the language and on the lands of Wolastoqiyik. It is honoured in the stories documented in “Mesq Kpihikonol-Before the Dam” (Perley, Perley, Plaice and Valk) and our many stories. It is found in the many new and emerging celebrations of our Wolastoq presence, our shared understandings. We celebrate our transforming lives and our growing assurance in our earth walk.

Sabattis-Atwin, A. (2015). *Ntokehkikem Ntokehkims*: A learning spirit.

Ntokehkikem Ntokehkims – “I teach, I learn” (Perley, I. 2015, pc). This phrase emphasizes the dual nature of teaching and learning where teaching becomes learning and learning becomes teaching. These are one and the same, coexisting in a fluid relationship between student and mentor, elder and youth, Wolastoqi and settler, allies and kin. *Ntokehkikem Ntokehkims* rests and resides in blood memory; its essence is in the land and the language. It lifts us up and binds us together. I teach, I learn explores our journeys into knowledge, and our sharing of wisdom.

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**Allan Sabattis-Atwin** is a Wolastoqi, a member of Oromocto First Nation, and a dedicated community visionary and organizer. He has sat as a council member for a number of years lending leadership to community development and education. Allan's spirit name is Nikanaptaq, which translates to "one who leads with wisdom and leaves tracks for generations to follow" (Imelda Perley, pc). He is a committed educator who has worked as a language and cultural teacher and community liaison for Oromocto High School, and now as a current PhD candidate at UNB, he gives his full attention to Wolastoqey knowledge and history, language and culture. Previously, he has held the role of Aboriginal Advisor and Coordinator of the Bridging Year Program for the Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Institute, University of New Brunswick.

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